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ABSTRACT

If there is to be a funeral for philosophy of education because of the conflict regarding its nature and functions, it will be a political funeral rather than a functional one. Diversity in philosophies suggests their generic function, which is a potent factor in the preparation and professional improvement of a teacher. A consideration of different theories of philosophy leads to the conclusion that philosophic functions are generically ongoing clarifications of cultural orientations. With such a definition in a course concerned with philosophies of education, aspirant teachers will be better prepared for their work and will be able to interpret what they do as teachers and what is being done to them by others. Obviously, no student can perform all functions possible in a generic treatment of philosophy of education, but they will all think and experience differently. Thus, a generic assumption concerning the nature of philosophies of education would give the greatest assurance of particular student identifications with a function in education that is philosophic. (JA)

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A GENERIC CLARIFYING FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

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A Generic Clarifying Function of Philosophy of Education

Philosophy of Education, the most ancient of the foundations of education exhibits the most conflict regarding its nature and functions. Since its conflicts are quite parallel to those in the general field of philosophy, one might safely assume that they have to do with some quality of the activity of philosophizing.

Some persons in other fields and even some philosophers of education probably regard this as a sign of an impending death of philosophy of education. The authors of this paper intend to show that diversity in philosophizing suggests a generic function which is a potent factor in the preparation and professional improvement of teachers. If there is to be a funeral of philosophy of education, it will be political rather than functional.

At this time in history philosophers have extensively examined the nature of their work, and at least four contending definitions have been offered by Western philosophers in the late twentieth century: (1) Philosophizing is the formulation and defense of comprehensive and systematic theories;¹ (2) Philosophizing is a broad and systematic attempt to deal with normative aspects of experience;² (3) Philosophizing is intense personal expression;³ (4) Philosophizing is a systematic attempt to clarify

¹William K. Frankena, "Toward a Philosophy of Education", Harvard Educational Review, 26, No. 2. Spring 1956, pp. 94-95.

²Ibid., pp. 94-94.

³Van Cleve Morris, Existentialism in Education, Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1966, p. 1.

language.⁴ If one adds the definitions of some Oriental philosophers to the list, he also discovers that philosophizing has been approached as something possibly including, but extending beyond, any intellectual or axiomatic concerns.

Although the possibility of a generic definition is presently a contended issue, such a definition is strongly implied by the present plurality. The fact is that philosophy of philosophy is significant and an important concern. Members of every other discipline can and do stop the process of investigating the foundations of their respective functions by simply declaring such an effort "philosophical." Philosophers are distinguished from them by having no place to legitimately cease their clarifying activities.

The current controversy over the nature of philosophizing shows that whenever one stops investigating his biases he risks being shown he is shallow by his peers. Abraham Kaplan, wrestling with the task of providing a general definition by which his book containing a great variety of contemporary philosophies could be understood, reached a very similar conclusion:

"For the business of philosophy as I see it, always was...and remains...to articulate the principles by which a man can live; not just as a scientist, citizen, religionist, or whatever, but as the whole man that he is. To describe a man's philosophy is to say how he orients himself to the world of experience, what meanings he finds in events, what values he aspires to, what standards guide his choices in all he does."⁵

⁴ Op. Cit., pp. 94-95.

⁵ Abraham Kaplan, The New World of Philosophy (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), p. 4.

John Elaf Boodin,⁶ a Swedish-American philosopher examining his life's work toward its end, may have uncovered the reason why philosophers have no point where they can legitimately terminate investigations and their consequent further clarifications. He noticed that all modes and interests of inquiry were once called "philosophy" in the Western World. However, specialization was evident from the third century B.C., and has accelerated ever since. Philosophers are increasingly losing areas of domain. Haunted by the traditional and distinctive unbounded nature of his field, the philosopher is urged to ask and respond to ever more fundamental questions. Continuing to clarify basic orientations others do not examine, the philosopher performs his distinctive service of assisting, planning, and generally increasing comprehension of what is being done by those around him.

While specialists other than intellectual historians have not provided historical analysis to assist determination of the nature of philosophizing, some of their descriptions of social patterns have contributed to this task. Anthropologist Frank Boas⁷ studied a great number of small and relatively isolated groups during his career, and noticed that philosophizing was primarily the concern of elite groups of intellectuals. These persons were distinguished from others in their total groups by their greater awareness of orientations underlying the customs and behaviors of peoples with whom they lived. They could explain, expound, and defend basic orientations against external attacks, while others could not do this with a great degree of success.

⁶John Elaf Boodin, Studies in Philosophy: The Posthumous Papers of John Elaf Boodin (Los Angeles: The University of California Printing Department, 1957), pp. 1-3.

⁷Frank Boas, Race, Language and Culture (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940), p. 315.

Philosophers, then, are generally different from others in making cultural orientations clear that many people fail or refuse to examine. Science, for example, cannot grow unless some stop to narrow areas of concern that will afford more precise treatment. Philosophers clearly do not do this. Philosophy is an ongoing clarification of cultural orientations that functions to give greater awareness of life ways. This can lead to new life ways and consequently to other types and means of philosophical clarification.

The foregoing does not mean that philosophers perform the same clarifying functions at a given time. It is intended as a generic definition. Being generic it includes functions such as broad theorizing, normative clarification, intense personal expression, language analysis, and others.

Nor, does it mean that it is not subject to further philosophic investigation and controversy for it draws its meaning from these processes. It may well be that more narrow approaches are to be desired over it for certain important purposes. All that has been established to this point is that it stands as a philosophical means to comprehend the present tensions in the field.

It can be demonstrated that by considering philosophic functions generically as ongoing clarifications of cultural orientations in a course concerned with philosophies of education, aspirant teachers will be better prepared for their professional work. The greater number of philosophic functions included would increase the chance that culturally different students will discover useful tools for their profession. The bias of the approach in favor of cultural clarification assures a greater possibility that students will be able to interpret what they do as teachers and what

is being done to them by others. Since it implies a fair hearing for many views and approaches, the assumption of a generic definition might well be conducive to the growth of a greater tolerance for difference--an important attitude for teachers in a pluralistic society.

Approached from a general perspective, philosophy can function in education as one or another or some combination of means to clarify cultural orientations that are significant influences upon educational aims, structures, and/or acts. Philosophy of education can be: (1) The drawing of implications for education from comprehensive and systematic theories; (2) Organizing and defining educational aims connected with axiological, ethical, and social theories; (3) Authentic personal expression in education; or it can be (4) The clarification of language pertaining to education. It can even be (5) some combination of different approaches listed above, or (6) a metacultural and generic treatment of all of the above.

Obviously, no student could gain a reasonable degree of competence in performing all functions possible in a generic treatment of philosophy of education. However, it is equally obvious that students will differ in the way they think, and hence, in the way they might approach and use philosophy of education. Their experiences and interest differ. Some may be affectively and socially oriented. Others may seek to intensify their personal, deciding, flesh-and-bones existence out of anxiety over the possibility of death, depersonalization in a mechanized age, etc. Still others may have developed detached, careful approaches--choosing to limit their activities to the analysis of some overt data. A few may even be most fascinated with the plurality of life-styles around them, and may be seeking to comprehend this and form clear attitudes concerning it. A generic assumption con-

cerning the nature of philosophy of education would give the greatest assurance of particular student identification with a function in education that is philosophical.

In so far as all philosophic functions are considered as means of clarifying cultural orientations, students can approach philosophy of education as means of clarifying major biases behind educational aims, structures, and/or acts. This approach, when made overt, promises to create a perspective for analysis of one's own views, modes of organization, and teaching acts in various ways. It is a perspective for personal control of professional behavior that breaks the chains of sheer training that hides its purposes and implications. Also, this perspective gives one a better understanding of what others will urge him to do in his profession.

Finally, the generic approach to philosophy in education, in treating each way of philosophizing as an alternative means of clarification to be judged within the context of its use, implicitly teaches the philosophic tolerance seen in the life and career of William James, and urged by J. E. Boodin and others. The student is put in a position of choosing between alternatives or showing that some unique approach is more desirable. He finds he cannot ignore or easily dismiss an orientation differing from his own. In fact, he is usually swayed from one approach to another in the early stages of his philosophic education. Even though there is some danger of loose eclecticism, a reduction in dogmatism is worth the risk. A professional educator who is unable to entertain another approach or view is not only incapable of growth, but his function in times full of tension such as these is negative.

If philosophy is one or another means of clarifying cultural orientations, then it cannot be pursued outside of some historic context. In fact, it has not been so pursued. Those who build comprehensive systems make use of events, scientific and other developments, approaches, etc., drawing them into meaningful syntheses. Normative philosophers base their valuations upon social conditions, and, as those in "whole view" philosophy, must gather evidence in order to defend their views. Philosophizing as intense personal expression arises out of anxiety-producing conditions. Those who analyze language both depend upon what has been said and what has come to be in accepted means of clarification to do their work.

Applied philosophy, whether applied in or to a field, is especially tied to historic developments. Nash states that "I am not entirely free to shape my own life, but I can do it more or less according to the extent that I come to terms with the authority of my own history."⁸ Philosophy of education depends upon there having been some notice of history and some description of the field of education have always dealt with educational precedents in some way.

On the other hand, history might take place, but it cannot be known or investigated apart from philosophic clarifications. The questions, "What is history?" and "What is the function of the Historian?" are clearly philosophical. They imply a clarification of basic cultural orientations.⁹

The context history might provide for a generic approach to philosophy of education would need to be broad, taking the many philosophic meanings

⁸Paul Nash, History and Education, Random House, Inc., New York, 1970, p. 5.

⁹Ibid., pp. 3-22.

of education into account. "History of education" would be the different significant orientations toward education as they appear in aims, structures and acts. The work of the historian would be revealing these orientations-- providing contexts for philosophical clarifications of educational movements of significance to potential workers in the field.

Thus, history of education would function in a course in the philosophy of education to help students become acquainted with significant orientations in education and their precedents. It would serve to provide a context for philosophic functions, and to show students that there are concrete bases for them. Beyond this, it would help them recognize aims, structures, and acts in education associated with philosophies so that they can better interpret their professional work and what others may urge them to do.

A generic definition of philosophy and history of education, most advantageous in projected practical effects, thus implies these aims:

(1) To provide a historic context for interpreting significant orientations exhibited in educational movements; (2) To involve many types of students in at least the beginnings of philosophic clarification; and (3) To facilitate tolerance of differences.

It is believed that this rationale offers a cogent treatment of historical and philosophical elements that is both legitimate to those disciplines and promises significant practical outcomes for aspirant educators.

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